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Super-Jet Disclosure Intensifies TFX Feud

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President Johnson yesterday may have intensified the long-standing TFX warplane controversy.

In announcing development of a new jet interceptor called the A-11, the President said the "mastery of the metallurgy and fabrication of titanium" was one of the achievements of the project.

Senate investigators immediately recalled that the proposed use of titanium was one of the principal reasons cited by Defense Secretary McNamara and Air Force Secretary Zuckert for rejecting the Boeing Aircraft Co.'s TFX design.

The Pentagon civilian secretaries, overruling unanimous military recommendations, awarded the \$6.5 billion TFX contract to the General Dynamics Corp's Fort Worth (Tex.) division.

Senator Not Surprised

"The President's approval and announcement of the use of titanium in the new interceptor A-11 comes as no surprise at all," Senator McClellan, Democrat of Arkansas, said.

"It long has been known that this metal has been used safely and its practical advantages have been proved by the use of it in other of our military planes.

"It will come as no surprise at all that the Pentagon officials who rejected titanium in the Boeing design will soon approve and order its use by General Dynamics in the TFX plane."

Senator McClellan, who heads the year-long TFX investigation, gave no reasons for this feeling. However, it is understood that the subcommittee has received information that General Dynamics has encountered difficulties in designing a plane for use by both the Air Force and the Navy.

One of the problems, it has been reported, is weight resulting from General Dynamics' use of the more conventional

metals in place of the lighter stronger titanium with its heat-resisting qualities. One source said the Navy, which requires a lighter plane than the Air Force, may not be able to use the TFX unless General Dynamics succeeds in solving the weight problem.

Secretary Zuckert acknowledged this in testimony February 4 before the House Armed Services Committee.

"We do have a problem with the Navy weight which comes from the fact that their requirements are difficult to meet," he testified. "I formed a group a couple of weeks ago which is working with the contractor and with the Navy in an effort to try to iron out this problem. We think the problem can be met."

Testimony Recalled

Assistant Secretary of the Air Force Alexander Flax indicated that some optional equipment of the General Dynamics TFX will be removed and lighter materials substituted in an effort to solve the weight problem. He presumably referred to the use of titanium.

To members of the subcommittee headed by Senator McClellan, this would be an ironic turn. In a statement to the subcommittee nearly a year ago, Mr. McNamara contended that Boeing's proposal "seemed likely to be a more complicated development risk (in) its extensive use of titanium."

In a memorandum justifying the decision to award the contract to General Dynamics, Mr. Zuckert cited as one major reason that the General Dynamics proposal contemplated the use of conventional metals.

Government officials insisted there was no conflict between these views and what the President said about the use of titanium in the A-11. Because of the technical knowledge derived from the A-11 program, it was said, the Pentagon officials were able to draw the conclusion they did with regard to the TFX plane.